

# critical digest

Vol. II No. 33

June 5, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

## Daily Critics Rate New Arena Play

The Showoff-Arena, Hotel Edison, 5/31/50. Daily critics reviewed both the George Kelly revivals and theatre in the round staging. Two critics thought the 1924 comedy was dated in its satire and weak in its structures. Rose of first nighters thought it held up remarkably. Coleman, Mirror, thinks the play deserves a Pulitzer prize. Atkinson, Times, Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, were the dissenters. Lee Tracy and Jane Seymour were credited with the best performances in a fine cast ably directed by Martin Manulis. Watts, Post, was the sole critic to hold reservations on central staging but his colleagues found it interesting, useful and cozy. Several mentioned that food and drink were available. Others were disturbed at seeing their fellow first nighters at such close range.

## Trade Critics View the Revival

A Streetcar Named Desire-City Center, 5/23/50. Hobe, Variety, considered the present Irene Selznick production disappointing entertainment. The subtlety, depth and compassion of the play is missing. Francis, Billboard, enjoyed the revival of the Tennessee Williams prize winning play now starring Uta Hagen and Anthony Quinn. He did think George Matthews was miscast physically in the part of Mitch.

## Report From London

A rarity of good plays reflecting contemporary England was reported by Clurman, New Republic; though he found the level of the theatre in London much higher than Paris. The best English production he has witnessed is Jean Anouilh's Ring Around the Moon, the best play Chekhov's Ivanov. Christopher Fry's Venus Observed was deemed an obscure, mediocre play with many bright lines. Clurman feels that close examination of Fry's work may show that the less serious one's approach the more his work improves.

## Five Plays Closing in New York

Come summer and New York's less successful plays fold. Recent Broadway closings include The Liar-Broadhurst, 5/18/50-5/27/50. Arms and the Girl-46th Street Theatre, 2/2/50-5/27/50. As You Like It-Cort, 1/28/50-6/3/50. The Innocents-Playhouse, 2/1/50-6/3/50. I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/50-6/3/50.

## Theatre Arts Critic on Current Plays

Helen Hayes dazzling performance in The Wisteria Trees overcomes a very weak script for the Theatre Arts critic. Cry of the Peacock and With a Silk Thread win prizes as the worst foreign and worst American plays of the season.

## Off Broadway Ibsen

Wide difference of opinion on Repertory Theatre's presentation of Master Builder Solness at the Cherry Lane Theatre. Catta, Times, viewed it as an intelligent and understanding modern portrayal of the Ibsen classic. He singled out John Scanlan for top honors in a fine cast. Garland, Journal American, thought it was poorly done. Follock, Compass, didn't think the cast worked hard enough, while Allen, Women's Wear Daily, thought it was on the whole forceful.

- - - - -  
' The Green Room Department '  
- - - - -

CONFESSIONS OF A SQUARE PEG...Garland, Journal American, is proud of his designation as "The Square Peg in the Drama Critics Circle," he told Grace and Paul Hartman on their WOR Breakfast with the Hartmans program broadcast from their dressing room at the Coronet Theatre. When the Circle was formed he wanted it to be a club for the daily critics only. Now he finds it is a large group that meets only to pick the best play. The voting is attended by critics from everything but throwaways. He thinks Ward Morehouse and he love the theatre more than any other critics. His article "Busman's Holiday" will be reprinted in the British magazine "Theatre Digest".

SUNDRY CAMPAIGNS..."Usher Exhibitionism" is a pet peeve of Hawkins, WT&S, who would rather hear the actors onstage than the ushers...Lee Tracy, WOR Theatrical Page continues to back up Morehouse's 7:00 P.M. curtain suggestion. Urges listeners to write if they would like it tested next season...Tracy also wants letters that complain and compliment the manners of box office men...Sheaffer, Eagle, hopes the City Council okays the bill for new theatre buildings.

CRITICS SURVEYS EXPLAINED...Billboard's second annual critic's award goes to Chapman, News, for predicting the success of the shows, while Variety's award went to Atkinson, Times. Chapman explained the paradox. Billboard rates a play a hit if it goes over 100 performances, Variety's yardstick is if the angels get their money back. Chapman would rather write to please the boxoffice than "the relatives, friends, passersby and assorted goons who think show angeling is a good way to back a fast buck."

MAE WEST INVESTIGATION...Senator Estes Kefauver, chairman of the Senate Crime Investigation Committee was urged by Sylvester, News, to look into the million dollar casino Mae West is going to build in Las Vegas, Nevada. There are all sorts of angles involved, and Sylvester would love the job as investigator.

AUDIENCE POLLED ON CRITICS...People's Drama, off Broadway group which produced Thomas Ward's John Brown, drew unfavorable reviews from the critics. But the arena type play ran six weeks. Audience poll found that several didn't care what the critics ever said. One comment was "no one of any intelligence should lend too much credence to the N.Y.critics." Pollock, Compass, printed the survey.

BESTS OF SEASON...Chapman, News, picked nine of his ten best plays for his Dodd, Mead book, when he appeared on WNBC Critic's Corner. They include The Cocktail Party, The Member of the Wedding, Lost in the Stars, The Happy Time, The Wisteria Trees Come Back, Little Sheba, The Innocents, The Enchanted and I Know My Love. More bests of the season next week.

PARTICIPATION DRAMA...Arena type theatre may be just what Broadway needs, comments Keating, Cue. If an actor gets hammy, you can reach over and conk him. Chapman News, likes it because you can give an actor a swift kick from a sitting position

- - - - -  
' Critical Notes '  
- - - - -

Three critics will appear in summer theatre plays. Garland, Journal American, will play the Judge in On Trial, Morehouse, WT&S, will play in Alias Jimmy Valentine and Hawkins, WT&S, will play the romantic lead in Coquette...Lee Posner, critic of Il Progresso, has commissioned the Jewish National Fund to plant ten trees in Tel Aviv in honor of the late publisher Generoso Pope...Charles Darton, one time dean of N.Y.critics who held the critic's post on the N.Y.Evening World for 21 years, died in Hollywood at the age of 80...Vernon Rice's Theatre Class at the Abbe Practical Work shop heard Peter Lawrence, Peter Pan producer speak on "The Broadway Theatre and the New Producer."

-----  
' Broadway Hits Revisited '

Mr. Roberts, with Henry Fonda still in the title role, won three rave reviews. Atkinson, Times, found the play by the late Thomas Heggen as fresh and hilarious as he did at its opening more than two years ago. Gilbert Seldes, WNEW Lively Arts, agreed that it sounds like What Price Glory did one war ago. Garland, Journal American, went even farther. He thought the play was better now than it was on opening night. Fonda was less self conscious, and the replacements are remarkably fine... Albert Dekker, the new lead in Death of a Salesman won the support of Francis, Billboard, and political columnist Lerner, Boston. Lerner considers Arthur Miller play worth seeing again and again because it is actually a play about the death of a father-son relation when false values come into a culture... Seldes doesn't think Come Back, Little Sheba was sufficiently praised for the dignity it invests in the sadness of the small life. It does more honor to the Theatre Guild than all of its musicals, and it is more completely qualified for the Pulitzer Prize than South Pacific.

-----  
' Interview Round Up '

NANCY BRINEY...Founder-Editor of "The Fireside Theatre", the Literary Guild sponsored theatre book club, is living proof of the "Never Underestimate the Power of a Woman" slogan in the eyes of Rice, Post. In Indianapolis she and her husband organized a book club which they ran from their basement. When he took a job in New York, she interested the Literary Guild in sponsoring it on a nationwide basis. It has grown from 103 members to over 11,000. The idea is to keep in step with the current Broadway hits.

ESIO PINZA...The 57 year old star of South Pacific leaves the hit show this week for a \$200,000 a year contract in Hollywood. "God has been good to me, for that reason I never fight with people. I assume they are right and I am wrong," he revealed to Sullivan, News, as he played catch with the Columnist's dog...Wilson Post, discovered that Pinza's motto is "Life Begins Tomorrow".

JUNIOR STANDTISH...Fields, Mirror, intrigued into interviewing the Gentlemen Prefer Blondes chorus girl by the inspired prose of press agent Richard Maney. He discovered that she lived up to his glowing words. A chorus girl since she was 13, she cooks, writes music, models, acts on TV, and found an apartment as soon as she got married. Truly a most unusual dame.

JOHN H.H. LYON...Professor Emeritus of Shakespeare at Columbia University, Dr. Lyon expressed violent views on recent Shakespeare products when he visited with WGR Marthe Deane. Michael Redgrave's Macbeth was the best ever seen on Broadway, but the carriage trade didn't support it. The galleries were packed with lovers of The Bard. He considers the recent portrayal of "Cleopatra" as a very bad job. The boy actors in Shakespeare's time probably did much better with the female parts than the actresses of today.

WILLIAM INGE...The author of The Innocents admitted to Morehouse, WT&S, that he thinks the weak, illogical ending the producer persuaded him to write for the adaptation of James "Turning of the Screw" is the reason the play closed. When the play is produced in Paris he will go back to the original, more brutal closing.

-----  
' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Photostats of reviews may be obtained at 25 cents each to subscribers, 50 cents each to others.



- |                            |                         |                        |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. NY Times                | 11. Newark News         | 21. Catholic World     |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune       | 12. Women's Wear Daily  | 22. Commonweal         |
| 3. NY News                 | 13. Daily Worker        | 23. Cue                |
| 4. NY Mirror               | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor    |
| 5. NY Compass (PM, Star)   | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Rev.Literature |
| 6. NY Post                 | 16. George Jean Nathan  | 26. Newsweek           |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse)      | 17. Morning Telegraph   | 27. Time               |
| 8. NY Journal American     | 18. Variety             | 28. Nation             |
| 9. NY World Telegram & Sun | 19. Billboard           | 29. New Republic       |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle         | 20. Theatre Arts        | 30. New Yorker         |

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Pro: 3-5-6-7-8-12-15-17-19-20-21-23-27-30.  
Con: 1-9-11-13-16-18-22-24-26-28-29. So-So: 2-4-10-14.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-15-17-18-19-20-23-24-26-27-28. Con: 1-9-14-22-25-29. So-So: 16-30.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Pro: 1-5-8-9-10-11-14-16-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-29. Con: 2-4-7-12-27. So-So: 3-6-30.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 22. So-So: 6-29. None: 20-21

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-26-27-30.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28. So-So: 16-22-27. None: 25.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

Lost in the Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 8-9-13-20-21-22-24-25-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. Con: 16. So-So: 2-27-30

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17-

Peter Pan-Imperial, 4/24/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-9-10-11-12-15-17-18-22-23-24-25-26-27-29. Con: 8-16-30. So-So: 6-7-14-19.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-21-24-25-26-30. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 3-6-9-12-13-14-15-16-17-21-22-24-Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27.

Where's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27.

The Wisteria Trees-Martin Beck, 3/29/50. Pro: 1-3-4-5-6-8-11-12-14-15-17-19-20-24. Con: 2-7-9-10-16-22-23-25-26-27-28-30. So-So: 18-29.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-12-13-14-15-17-19-20-22-23-24-29. Con: 11-16-27-30. So-So: 26.

- - - - -  
 ' News & Notes '  
 - - - - -

British Drama Critics Circle will hold a series of lectures on their trade at Stratford-on-Avon...One of the French policemen who guarded Victor Kravchenko during his Paris libel trial was a drama critic..."Intolerance is frequently a synonym for intelligence", Sobol, Journal American, quotes as a George Jean Nathan definition...WABD Broadway to Hollywood rates the shows on a special meter. George Putnam gave The Liar 65 per cent...Wolcott Gibbs' play, A Summer in the Sun is said to throw barbs at novelist, John O'Hara.

